

Mouth care Information Sheet

Patient/ Family/Whānau guide

When someone is seriously ill, their mouth can become dry, sore, and they may notice changes in taste or experience bad breath. This can happen due to cancer, other illnesses, treatments like chemotherapy or radiotherapy, medications, or a weakened immune system.

If your loved one is able, encourage them to brush their teeth twice daily with a soft toothbrush. If brushing becomes too uncomfortable, mouth rinses can help. We've included some simple homemade recipes for rinses on the next page.

As your loved one approaches the final stages of their illness, mouth care becomes even more important. At this stage, it's common for a person to breathe through their mouth, which can cause the mouth to dry out and become coated or crusty. Regular mouth care can be very refreshing and can help keep your loved one more comfortable. Here are some things that may be helpful.

- Your community nurse can supply you with mouth swabs. Mouth swabs are foam swabs attached to a plastic stick.
- The nurse can show you how to care for your loved one's mouth.
- Begin by dipping the swab in water or a diluted mouthwash, or even their favourite drinks.
- Then gently wipe between the gums and teeth, roof of mouth, and under tongue to moisten the mouth and remove any debris.
- If your loved one wears dentures, these can be removed for cleaning or simply to help them feel more comfortable, especially if they are loose.
- Apply a light layer of lip balm to prevent dry, cracked lips
- Mouth care can be done as often as is needed or as comfortable for the patient. Sometimes, your loved one may close their mouth tightly to indicate that they don't want mouth care at that moment. If this happens, do not force it
- If the swab causes coughing, pause and use less liquid on the swab.
- If you notice anything unusual in the mouth, such as a thick white coating or redness on the tongue, or ulcers please let the nurse or GP know. Remember, keeping the mouth clean and comfortable is an important part of providing care and easing discomfort

Mouth Rinse Recipe:

1. Saline – 200mls water with half a teaspoon of salt
2. Baking soda mix 200mls of water, ¼ teaspoon of baking soda, and ¼ teaspoon of salt.
3. Ice chips to help with a dry mouth, or you may like to try diluted frozen fruit juices, such as pineapple juice.

Please see the below link which has some helpful information for whanau and caregivers.

[Ending Life Well Podcast | Otago Community Hospice](#)

Kind acknowledgement to Otago Community Hospice for sharing this information